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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
*Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-12
Health Care	13-18
Day Care	19-20
Domestic Violence	21-23
Welfare Reform	24-25

*Important story at this spot

Police awaiting autopsy results on foster child

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

August 18, 2006

The attorney for a Detroit foster mother under scrutiny after a 2-year-old foster child died in her care this week said Thursday that his client has no idea why or how the child died.

"She feels horrible about what happened," attorney Marc Shreeman said of Charlise Rogers. "She doesn't know what happened."

An autopsy on the toddler, Issac Lethbridge, is to be performed today to determine a cause and manner of the boy's death Wednesday evening at Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit, officials said.

A preliminary report from Detroit police filed Thursday in Wayne County Family Court said Issac had second-degree burns on his stomach and back and bruises on his forehead, shoulder and buttocks.

The child's unexplained death prompted the Child Protective Services division of the state Department of Human Services to remove Issac's biological sister from Rogers' foster home, as well as two of Rogers' three adopted daughters, ages 20 months and 12 years. Rogers' third daughter is 18.

Detroit police were called to Rogers' home in the 18000 block of Greenlawn about 4:30 p.m. Wednesday on a report of an unconscious child. Issac was rushed to Children's Hospital, where he was pronounced dead about an hour later, the report said.

No arrest has been made as homicide detectives awaited results of the autopsy.

Rogers is to appear at a preliminary hearing in juvenile court next Friday.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at jkresnak@freepress.com.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**

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August 18, 2006

Autopsy ordered on foster child

Detroit toddler who was dead on arrival at Children's Hospital had signs of old injuries.

Norman Sinclair / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- An autopsy will be performed today in the case of a 2-year-old Detroit foster child who was dead on arrival at Children's Hospital on Wednesday.

Detroit police were called to the child's foster home in the 18000 block of Greenlawn shortly before 5 p.m.

Officers found the boy, Issac Lethbridge, unresponsive in his crib.

Albert Samuels, chief investigator for the Wayne County medical examiner, said the preliminary report from the hospital indicated the youngster had old bruises on his forehead and buttocks.

Samuels said the report did not mention any other injuries on the child.

The home is operated by Charese Rodgers, who could not be reached for comment Thursday on the incident.

Karen Stock of the Department of Human Services said the agency was notified about the case on Thursday.

"We are aware of the situation and we are conducting an investigation but we have no other details as yet," Stock said.

Stock could not confirm reports that there were six other children ages 4-17 who were removed from the home by authorities.

You can reach Norman Sinclair at (313) 222-2034 or nsinclair@detnews.com.

[Return to regular web page](#)



Muskegon Chronicle

Man, 37, in 'contract sex' case faces trial on other charges

Friday, August 18, 2006

By John S. Hausman

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A man charged with having sex with his girlfriend's 15-year-old daughter under a written "contract" with the girl and her mother now faces trial in a second case, involving multiple alleged sex acts with a 12-year-old girl.

Michael Jon Fitzgibbon, 37, of 36 Harrison on Thursday waived his right to a preliminary examination in Muskegon County's 60th District Court on six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a person younger than 13, a potential life felony. Visiting Judge Robert Benson ordered Fitzgibbon bound over to 14th Circuit Court for trial on all counts. Fitzgibbon remains lodged in the Muskegon County Jail with bail denied.

The 12-year-old disclosed numerous instances of alleged sexual abuse after Fitzgibbon was charged in the other case. He was charged in the younger girl's case last week.

Fitzgibbon already faces trial in two separate cases involving the 15-year-old, with a total of six counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct with a person between the ages of 13 and 15. He was bound over for trial in those cases after a preliminary hearing earlier this month.

The mother in that case has also been charged with three counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct with a person 13-15 years old and is scheduled for a preliminary examination next Tuesday. The Chronicle is not identifying her to protect the daughter, who is an alleged victim of sex abuse and not charged with any crime in the case.

The earlier case arose after the woman, afraid of losing her boyfriend while recuperating from surgery, allegedly arranged to have her 15-year-old daughter be his sex partner for two months. Evidence includes testimony of a contract signed by all three that specifies sexual services and the "pay" the girl would get, including clothing and body piercings. Fitzgibbon was charged in that case July 24, the girlfriend last week.

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Aug 17, 10:09 PM EDT

Man accused of sex with girlfriend's daughter, 15, waives exam

MUSKEGON, Mich. (AP) -- A man accused of entering an agreement to have sex with his girlfriend's 15-year-old daughter while the girlfriend recuperated from surgery waived his preliminary exam Thursday.

A district court judge in Muskegon bound over Michael J. Fitzgibbon, 37, of Muskegon Heights, for arraignment in Muskegon County Circuit Court on Aug. 24.

Police have said Fitzgibbon, his girlfriend and the teenager signed a written agreement specifying the sexual services the girl would perform and the compensation she would receive, including clothing and body piercings. Fitzgibbon and girl had sex about 20 times, police said.

Fitzgibbon is charged with six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, punishable by up to life in prison, and six counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct, punishable by up to 15 years in prison. He was being held without bail.

The woman was charged with three counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct that accuse her of facilitating the assaults. She was freed after posting a \$25,000 bond.

A preliminary exam in the mother's case was scheduled for Aug. 22.

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Former teacher heads to prison

Friday, August 18, 2006

DARRYL Q. TUCKER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Convicted sex offender and laid-off Buena Vista School District teacher Laura L. Findlay wants a second chance after prison.

She said she hopes to marry and have children.

"I deeply regret everything that has happened," Findlay said Thursday in Saginaw County Circuit Court. "I'm extremely sorry. I believe God has forgiven me. I am sorry."

Findlay, 32, apologized to the families of the Ricker Middle School boys she had sex with from November 2004 to March 2005. She taught for seven years and was the band instructor.

During her 18 months in jail, Findlay said she has had two birthdays. She said she would one day like to have a family.

For her crimes, Circuit Judge William A. Crane sentenced Findlay to seven to 25 years in prison, with credit for 505 days, for 22 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a person younger than 16.

Crane also ordered Findlay to register as a sex offender and to pay \$1,380 in fees and fines.

First-degree criminal sexual conduct involves penetration and is the most serious sexual offense. Last month, she pleaded guilty.

The teens, who were band members and basketball players, said the incidents occurred in the band room or in Findlay's sport utility vehicle behind Fort Saginaw Mall, at East Holland and South Outer Drive.

The mother of one of the teens said she and her son have undergone counseling because of Findlay. She said she relocated her family to Grand Rapids because of what happened.

"(Findlay) should suffer the consequences," the woman said. "It was devastating to us."

Findlay's attorney, James F. Piazza, said his client was a good teacher with a good background who just happened to make a few errors. He said he was disappointed Findlay didn't get a 20-year maximum sentence.

"She lost her career and lost her dream," Piazza said. "This incident is totally out of character for her. She viewed her victims as adults."

Assistant Prosecutor James T. Borchard said Findlay received at least seven years in prison because the victims and their families agreed to the plea deal. The victims now won't have to relive the episodes again in front of jurors, Borchard said.

Findlay knew the seriousness of her acts, he said.

"This was not a crime of passion," Borchard said. "She preyed upon these children."

Crane called the crimes "egregious and stunning."

Teachers are supposed to lead students down the right path, Crane said, adding that Findlay violated the public's trust and "it cannot be ignored. You should have known better," Crane told her.

Board of Education members did not fire Findlay but suspended her, then laid her off as part of budget cuts. Superintendent Deborah T. Clarke said Thursday the district will discuss Findlay's status at a future meeting. v

Darryl Q. Tucker covers courts for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9686.

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Keeping felons fair

Ed board members decided correctly, but did predecessors?

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, August 18, 2006

The Flint Board of Education emerged intact this week from an embarrassing episode - forced to decide whether to keep five people on the payroll after they'd been revealed as felons. The board's affirmative decision was fair and decent under the circumstances.

All the convictions date back a decade or more, and accounts indicate all five have served the district satisfactorily or better in the interim. They should not be dogged and penalized to the end of their days - over and above the punishments they received at the hands of the law - or restricted from school employment, providing there is no reason to consider them dangerous to children.

None has any sexually-related convictions, which would automatically trigger firing under a new state law that has been implemented - albeit gradually and awkwardly - that calls for background checks on all the state's public school employees. The system should run more smoothly in the future, as new hires will be fingerprinted and checked for criminal records before they are given contracts.

Short of being faced with an application from a felonious sex-offender, school boards may consider each case individually, a standard that is fair to both the applicants and the schools.

Yet, there will never be a clear-cut right decision when a felon applies, as Flint school board member Raymond Hatter emphasized by casting the sole negative vote against allowing the five to remain on the job. His argument for the principle of setting an example for young people cannot be completely refuted. But given the dicey choice, the board's majority made a tolerable compromise.

One good reason to rule in favor of the Flint employees is their longevity, with hire-on dates for the five ranging between 1979 and 2003. The time to question proprieties is at the beginning of a tenure, not years or decades into it.

Still, the hiring of a language arts teacher in 1996, for instance, is curious in light of his conviction for delivery/manufacture of marijuana that same year. A child care teacher, hired in 1998, had been convicted of counterfeiting just two years earlier, causing wonder at just what was going on in the minds of the people doing the hiring.

Background checks in the future will make it harder for people with those kinds of records to succeed with their applications.

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Aug 18, 12:38 PM EDT

Man faces 420-plus counts in child sex

FREEHOLD, N.J. (AP) -- A self-employed contractor was indicted Friday on hundreds of counts of child sex assault and child pornography after authorities said he spent years molesting children and recording them while he worked at their homes.

Clement Bilski Jr., 43, is accused of preying on at least 11 girls and boys, the oldest just 8 years old, between 1998 and 2005.

He abused them in their own homes, often while caretakers were elsewhere in the houses, then offered the children toys and candy to stay quiet, said Monmouth Prosecutor Luis Valentin.

"The depravity in this case has no boundaries," Valentin said.

Bilski was charged in the grand jury indictment with 74 counts of first-degree aggravated sexual assault, 30 counts of second-degree aggravated sexual assault and 295 counts of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child by the manufacture of child pornography. He also faces charges of criminal restraint, weapons possession and endangering the welfare of a child.

Bilski was arrested in April after Maryland State Police reported that a computer traced to Bilski was sharing child pornography over the Internet, Valentin said.

Until the indictment Friday, he had been held in a county jail on charges of endangering the welfare of a child and distribution and possession of child pornography.

Bilski's job allowed him to get into homes where he could watch and abuse children from vantage points unseen by parents and other caregivers, Valentin said.

He used ropes and handcuffs to detain children, videotaped himself abusing them and showed pornographic photos and videos to at least two of them, the prosecutor said. The suspect also secretly videotaped children "in various states of undress," Valentin said.

He is "a deviant sexual predator who targeted the most innocent and defenseless members of our community," Valentin said.

It was not immediately clear if Bilski had an attorney.

Neighbor Bud Mandeville told The Star-Ledger of Newark that Bilski was a kind and considerate person. He recalled a time when, after completing a renovation job, Bilski cautioned Mandeville's son to keep his 2-year-old daughter away from the paint fumes.

"Never in a million years would I think he would do what he did," said Mandeville, who said he's known Bilski for 15 years. "He was a good friend. It's sad. It's terrible what he did to the families and it's terrible what he did to himself."

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Good news: DCS is making kids lives better

By Patrick W. Lawler

August 18, 2006

Bio info: Patrick W. Lawler is CEO of Youth Villages, a Tennessee- based private provider of mental health services for troubled children and their families.

Things have improved for children in the custody of the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS).

That's the truth, but you may not have heard it.

Almost all of the news stories about DCS accentuate the negative. While it's crucial for the public to know about problems with the department, it's also important for the citizens of Tennessee to hear about the department's sweeping systemic changes making things better for our most vulnerable children.

As the chief executive officer of Youth Villages, I work closely with child welfare officials, not only in Tennessee but across the nation. Many Tennesseans may not realize that the problems confronting DCS are not unique to our state. Children in most states today face the same huge challenges. Nationwide, there are too many children in state custody, too few foster homes. There is too much reliance on residential placements for children who should be helped in their own homes and communities, and too little funding for older youth and young adults "aging out" of state foster care.

Change in Tennessee DCS has been going on for almost 10 years. The pace of change has increased since 2001 when the state settled a class action lawsuit brought by Children's Rights, a national advocacy group. The settlement agreement, over court-appointed monitor, sets standards for the care of children in the custody of the State of Tennessee with timeline for reforms.

The State of New Jersey settled a similar suit just last month, and many other states are under court orders. While Tennessee alone is facing challenges, it does stand apart from some others on the amount of progress that has been made through the state's leadership's ongoing dedication to finding the best ways to help children.

Here are some of the good things happening at DCS:

Pilot projects are under way to dramatically reduce the number of children in state custody. Using intensive in-home case management to empower struggling parents, DCS strives both to prevent children from ever entering state custody, as well as to increase the number of children who return home to their families.

DCS asked for and received a federal grant allowing subsidized guardianship to help keep children with their extended families when they cannot safely remain with their parents.

Adoption numbers are up dramatically. In one two-month period, 450 adoptions were finalized.

By placing a medical director in Nashville and psychologists in each region, DCS now carefully monitors the psychiatric medications taken by children in custody. This DCS policy has become a national model.

Tennessee has appropriated \$12 million to add more caring foster homes for children.

Our Department of Children's Services is one of the first in the nation to begin adequately addressing the needs of foster children who are entering adulthood. This focus has yielded a dramatic increase in the number of our former foster children in college: Two years ago there were just 70 enrolled; this year, there are 300. The department is looking at ways to increase the number of these young adults, helping them find homes, health care and good jobs and to continue their education after age 18.

All of these things are good news for the state's children. DCS Commissioner Viola Miller, brought in from Kentucky by Bredesen in 2003, is tough-minded and absolutely driven to improve the lives of the children in her custody. She knew a large department she would first have to change the organizational systems. That type of change doesn't come easy, doesn't make newspaper headlines. But it has made a real difference in the lives of children.

Some of the most important systemic changes at the department include:

The development of a proven core leadership team.

The implementation of an evidence-based practice model.

The adoption of performance-based contracting.

The development of a technology system that can track and report information on each child.

The integration of quality assurance and continuous quality improvement at every level.

Miller and her staff have reached out to national experts and organizations. The department worked with a consortium of universities to develop a new training model for young caseworkers. Working with Tennessee universities, the department provides tuition reimbursement to students who pledge to make child welfare their careers. The department's list of consultants "Who's Who" in child welfare, with assistance coming from such organizations as The University of Chicago's Chapin Family Services and others.

Reforming any system or organization as large as the Department of Children's Services takes time. It is important that the changes made not for short-term fixes but for long-term sustainability. Miller and her leadership team are making good decisions and important cultural changes that are helping children today and will benefit children and families from here on.

Contact Patrick Lawler at Pat.Lawler@YouthVillages.org or (901) 251-4802.

MORE COLUMNIST COLUMNS »

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

'A real chasm' Levin, seniors voice concerns over 'doughnut hole,' other features of Medicare drug plan

Friday, August 18, 2006

By Dave Person

dperson@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8555

Bob Richards, a Vicksburg resident and recent retiree, remembers a promise he says was made to him and other World War II veterans some 60 years ago.

Because of their sacrifice to their country, they would never have to worry about paying for health care.

"That was the promise they made to all vets when they were discharged," said Richards, 80. "That (promise) doesn't exist anymore."

Lack of trust, and a fear of the so-called "doughnut hole" insurance-coverage gap that many enrollees in the Medicare Part D prescription-drug plan will fall into, have kept Richards from taking part in the plan, which took effect Jan. 1.

"I thought, 'What's going to happen when the doughnut hole hits me?'" he said.

But it didn't keep him from attending an informal discussion with U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, an opponent of the drug plan, when the Democratic senator visited Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services offices Thursday.

"The doughnut hole is a real chasm where people just suddenly fall in this gap (in coverage)," Levin told nearly two dozen seniors and professionals who assist seniors in working through the Medicare Part D maze.

Like Levin, Richards says there's a better way.

"If you go to Europe, they have the ability to negotiate with the pharmaceutical companies in America. ... But if you live in the United States, you can't do it," Richards told Levin.

Levin said he believes universal health care is the solution to drug-coverage woes.

Some say universal health care is socialized medicine, but it's not, Levin said. "Universal health care requires everybody to have insurance; that's not socialized medicine," he said.

Dr. Owen Berow, of Kalamazoo, encouraged Levin to actively oppose the current plan, which he and Levin both say was written by pharmaceutical companies for their own benefit and ignores seniors, many of whom can't afford the costs passed down to them.

Seniors worried about falling through the doughnut hole may be able to avoid the costly coverage gap or at least cushion the fall, say officials at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees Medicare.

“If you're getting close or getting concerned about the coverage gap, you can work with your doctor or drug plan to see if there's a generic that might be available at a lower cost,” said Peter Ashkenaz, a spokesman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid. “There are things you can do.”

Medicare Part D offsets drug costs for beneficiaries and requires some co-payments, deductibles and premiums of about \$25 a month. About 639,000 of Michigan's 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries are enrolled in Part D.

By law, Part D drug plans must, on average, cover 75 percent of drug costs after a \$250 deductible and up to \$2,250 in drug purchases by the beneficiary and the drug plan. That's where the coverage gap kicks in.

Seniors must accumulate \$3,600 in out-of-pocket costs -- all premiums, co-payments and purchases count toward that -- before the health plans step in to pay 95 percent of a senior's drug costs. Officials say that second threshold is reached at about \$5,100 in drug purchases.

To ease the burden of the coverage gap, Health and Human Services recommends seniors be proactive in managing their drug costs. Officials suggest seniors:

- Use the monthly “evidence of benefits,” or EOB, from the drug plan to gauge the pace of drug spending and look for savings.
- Ask a physician or pharmacist if there are generic alternatives to high-priced, name-brand drugs and switch to those products when medically acceptable.
- Take advantage of pharmacy discounts to reduce costs, although it's important to send the receipts for any purchases to the drug plan so the spending can be applied against the out-of-pocket requirement.
- Sign up for patient-assistance programs with drug manufacturers to receive reduced-price drugs.

A PriceWaterHouseCoopers report estimates that about 8 percent of Medicare Part D beneficiaries nationally will see a gap in coverage. That translates to about 1.7 million people nationally and some 50,000 in Michigan.

Some members of Congress are concerned that the coverage gap could prompt seniors to stop taking drugs or filling prescriptions, since monthly pharmacy bills for those in the gap have jumped from \$60 to \$300 in some cases.

To help ease the financial burden, Democrats have introduced legislation to eliminate the monthly premium while seniors are in the coverage gap.

“If you're not getting help, you shouldn't have to pay a premium,” said Democratic U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Michigan's junior senator. “We would say most immediately those premiums should be waived.”

But federal officials say Medicare Part D is an insurance program and the costs need to be made up through monthly premiums, even when seniors aren't receiving benefits.

Gazette Washington Bureau reporter Sarah Kellogg contributed to this report.

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Medicaid fraud tied to Omnicare

Michigan one of several states to probe its firms for overcharges

BY KATIE MERX

FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

August 18, 2006

Allegations of Medicaid fraud at **Specialized Pharmacy Services** are nothing new for the prescription drug distributor's owner, **Omnicare Inc.**

Michigan is just the latest of several states to investigate Omnicare Inc. subsidiaries for overcharging the individual states' Medicaid systems.

Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox on Wednesday charged Daniel Lohmeier, president of Specialized Pharmacy Services in Livonia, with bilking the Michigan Medicaid system out of about \$5 million since 1998 in the state's largest health care crime.

Medicaid is a health program for low-income residents. Its operating budget is paid for with state and federal tax dollars, so allegations of fraud mean Michigan residents may have paid more for the program than they got out of it.

Cox's office has said the investigation is ongoing. State employees have said more charges could come as early as next week.

Specialized Pharmacy is the state's largest distributor of prescription drugs to Michigan long-term care facilities. It billed the state's Medicaid program about \$75 million in 2005. Specialized Pharmacy is a subsidiary of Omnicare, the nation's largest distributor of drugs to long-term care facilities. Omnicare reports more than \$6 billion in annual revenue.

The federal government and several other states are investigating allegations that subsidiaries of Covington, Ky.-based Omnicare fraudulently switched nursing home patients to more-expensive prescription capsules from less-expensive prescription tablets of the same medicine because the pharmaceutical suppliers could collect more for capsules.

Omnicare (NYSE: OCR) said in a Securities and Exchange Commission filing that it has set aside \$53.4 million to cover a potential settlement in the Michigan

investigation.

In 2004, Omnicare paid \$1.1 million to settle allegations of Medicaid fraud in Maine.

Last year, Omnicare agreed to pay \$5.75 million to the State of New York to settle allegations of Medicaid billing irregularities.

And earlier this year, the company received subpoenas from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Massachusetts seeking information about Omnicare's relationships with certain manufacturers and distributors of pharmaceutical products.

"Omnicare operates in a highly regulated industry and for any health care company, federal and state inquiries and reviews are not unusual," said Andy Brimmer, a spokesman for the publicly traded Fortune 500 company. "It's Omnicare's policy to cooperate fully."

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Flint's black infant deaths drop in wake of local efforts

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, August 18, 2006

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll

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FLINT - Black infant deaths are declining in the city, according to a community report released Thursday about efforts to turn around the persistent problem.

Preliminary estimates are that 24 black babies died in 2005, far fewer than the 44 deaths in 1999 when a federally funded effort began to reduce Flint's black infant-mortality rate.

"We want no baby to die," said Yvonne Lewis, executive director of Faith Access to Community Economic Development, a community action group known as FACED. "But black babies die three times more often. We knew we had to get involved."

A Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health 2010 grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was put to use in Flint to reduce racial differences in infant mortality. The grant ends next year.

Infant mortality is a measure of how many babies die before reaching their first birthday. The leading causes of death have been premature birth and low-birth weight.

What REACH 2010 says is keeping mothers and babies healthier:

- Maternal and Infant Health Advocates have joined with 691 black women and chaperoned them on medical visits and helped with referrals to parenting classes.
- A "Face Up to Wake Up" campaign urged mothers to put babies to sleep on their back as a defense against sudden infant death syndrome.
- A one-stop village like Flint Family Roads has provided a pregnancy and parenting resource for women. Sixty percent of those who attend have babies weighing 5.8 pounds or more. Normal birthweight is about 7 pounds.

While at least 11 doctors' offices have adopted a prenatal questionnaire developed by REACH to identify health and social problems among expectant mothers, doctors have said the issue of infant mortality goes beyond medicine. It is driven by what's going on in women's lives, such as job and financial security and safe housing.

Black babies die most often in the 48503, 48504, 48505 and 48458 ZIP codes, where unemployment is also high.

QUICK TAKE

Want to know more?

- For information about improving the health of mothers and infants or to get involved in infant mortality prevention efforts, call (810) 767-2274, ext. 5683.

Cultural education has been another component of improving the health of mothers and infants because "if we feel better about ourselves, we'll make better choices in the long run," Lewis said.

Partners in REACH 2010 include FACED, the Genesee County Health Department, Greater Flint Health Coalition, University of Michigan-Flint, Genesys Regional Medical Center and Hurley Medical Center.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Woman's day care license suspended

State takes 'emergency action' but won't release details; Ypsilanti Twp. woman had previous violations

Friday, August 18, 2006

BY KHALIL E. HACHEM

News Staff Reporter

The state has suspended the day care license of an Ypsilanti Township woman, citing violations of Department of Human Services child care rules and regulations. The state said it intends to revoke her license to provide day care services.

The suspension of Betty McMullan's license Wednesday came after an investigation, according to a state press release that provided few additional details.

The state cited violations of the Child Care Organization Act and administrative rules, including supervision, caregiver responsibilities, and ratio of staff to children. The state "took emergency action to protect the health, welfare and safety of children," the release said.

Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said she could not release additional information about what prompted the emergency action pending the outcome of further investigation, which is expected to take several weeks. She refused to say whether any children had been injured.

McMullan, in a message left for The News on Thursday, said the state suspended her license because her son uses her home address. "It's unfair," she said. She could not be reached for further clarification.

The suspension prohibits McMullan from operating a day care center in her house or any other place, and requires her to notify the parents of the children she cared for of the suspension, the press release said.

McMullan obtained her license on Oct. 25. It allowed her to care for 12 children in the basement and the kitchen, living room and one bedroom on the first floor of her home, days, nights, and overnight, seven days a week. State records show McMullan was in compliance with requirements at the time the license was issued.

In April, the state issued a provisional renewal after McMullan submitted a corrective plan for several violations, including applicant and assistant caregivers having proof of valid first aid training, and keeping records on the children, including details on immunizations, discipline policies and information on the children's health.

State records indicated in April that nine children were enrolled in her day care center, and cared for by two staff members. They indicated she did not have children's records, and staff did not have required CPR and first aid certification.

The records indicate she was given time to become compliant and issued a provisional license.

Khalil E. Hachem can be reached at khachem@annarbornews.com or 734-482-3225.



Women's center to close after 30 years

Of The Oakland Press

The Women's Survival Center of Oakland County will close because of mounting debt, after almost 30 years of serving thousands of abused and needy women.

"In many ways, we have struggled to stay alive. But there's a day when you wake up and say, 'It's not responsible to keep doing this.' And responsibility is knowing when to close so you can eventually pay all your debts," said Sue Nine, president of the Women's Survival Center Board of Directors.

The board voted unanimously Monday to dissolve the Bloomfield Hills-based agency's operations immediately. The center - a nonprofit United Way of Oakland County partner - primarily helped victims of domestic violence and low-income women.

Since its founding in 1977, the Women's Survival Center assisted tens of thousands of people through its pro bono legal defense program called Personal Protection Order office, housed at the Oakland County Circuit Court; counseling programs; and child care center Maggie's Rising Stars in Pontiac.

Lately, the agency served about 10,000 people a year.

Nine said the financial difficulty stems from lack of funds for administrative costs. The agency had no problem obtaining grant money for programs but needed help with overhead, operations, rent and employee salaries.

But officials are working to move the agency's programs to complementary organizations within the community, so clients can receive support in a seamless fashion.

The Personal Protection Order office will most likely go to HAVEN, a nonprofit center for prevention and treatment of

domestic and sexual violence in Pontiac. Families, children and staff of Maggie's Rising Stars child-care will relocate to three Pontiac child care centers.

And the pro bono legal services will be picked up by the Legal Aid Defense Fund in Detroit. The fund has a Pontiac office and will assume attorneys for the center, as well as handle all open cases, Nine said. The Women's Survival Center handled up to 900 divorce and custody cases a year at no cost to the clients.

Most of the staff, about 14, can continue employment at the agencies assuming each of the programs.

Nine said that although the board considered dozens of options, closing is "fiscally responsible."

"The climate for fund-raising for all agencies has gotten so tight because of the serious economic condition in the state," she said. "It will cause lots of agencies to think about combining services."

It will take a minimum of three to five years before the Michigan economy is strong enough for people to use their discretionary income to support charities again, said Jim McTevia, managing director of McTevia & Associates in Bingham Farms. The company assists financially distressed businesses and nonprofit organizations.

"Certainly, in Southeast Michigan, where we are so dependent on the success or failure of the auto industry, one does not have to look very far to see the suffering is very, very deep," he said.

"Unfortunately, when people are struggling to pay their bills, mortgage and basic needs, they don't have funds available to donate to charities they would like."

Beth Morrison, HAVEN president and CEO, said the closing of the Women's Survival Center could put more strain on local agencies.

"Hopefully, other agencies will be able to pitch in and fill the void that's been left behind so (the closing) doesn't ultimately have a continuing negative effect," she said.

"A lot of services have had to wind down their operations. It

doesn't mean they're not needed or that society doesn't deserve those services. It just means that services can't be provided by people who are also reliant to pay their bills," McTevia said. "It's a vicious circle that goes around."

But Lawrence Gardner, owner of Lawrence Gardner & Associates, a financial consulting firm in Troy that boosts fledging nonprofits, disagrees.

Gardner said although it's more difficult now to garner money from individuals and corporations, it can be done with an innovative marketing plan that shows the importance of the nonprofit organization's services.

"The ones that aren't doing that aren't going to make it, no matter how beneficial the program may be," Gardner said. "You need effective leadership to dig deeper and present what your needs are, as opposed to business as usual."

Because of strict privacy policies, The Oakland Press was unable to speak with clients of the Women's Survival Center.

Still, Nine gave an example of a common client.

"It's somebody who was beaten, (has) a child or two and (was) left bruised by the batterer. The batterer puts all her clothing in a garbage bag and takes it to work, thinking she can't leave home with nothing to wear. Women often turned up at our door wearing his hunting clothes and boots, with a baby in a blanket," she said.

"We are proud of what we did. We helped people make huge steps."

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News Release

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Welfare reform pilot program will put people back to work and help Kent County families achieve self-sufficiency

August 18, 2006

GRAND RAPIDS – Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) Director Marianne Udow and Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth Director Robert W. Swanson today showcased one of four statewide welfare reform pilot plans in Kent County. These pilots will enable more families to achieve self-sufficiency and meet new federal work participation requirements.

“A key part of our economic plan is ensuring that every person in Michigan has the skills they need to get a good job,” said Governor Jennifer M. Granholm. “This program provides that opportunity for thousands of people currently dependent on welfare while saving the state money.”

The welfare reform pilot, called Jobs, Education and Training (JET), was developed jointly by the Michigan Department of Human Services and the Department of Labor & Economic Growth (DLEG) to help welfare recipients become self-sufficient and permanently attached to the labor force.

“The Jobs, Education and Training approach fundamentally changes the way we move families off welfare and toward self-sufficiency,” Udow said. “Instead of telling those on welfare to ‘get a job, any job,’ the program supports them in developing job skills and moving permanently off of the welfare rolls.”

Beginning in September 2004, DHS director Marianne Udow and then-DLEG director David Hollister led a broad-based welfare reform work group that developed a new approach to creating permanent work force status for DHS clients. The JET approach grew out of this work group and the pilot programs were included in the fiscal year 2006 DHS budget. The JET pilot sites are located in Kent, Oakland, Sanilac, and Wayne counties.

“JET brings together a statewide partnership between DLEG, DHS, Michigan Works! agencies and local workforce development boards that will connect individuals to the education and training resources they need to get, keep and advance in the skilled jobs that employers have now,” Robert W. Swanson, director of the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth, said.

The JET pilots:

- Use a thorough up-front assessment and “Family Self-Sufficiency Plan” to tailor supports and services to the individual circumstances of recipient and family.
- Expand educational and training opportunities so clients gain the skills they need to get a good paying job.

-MORE-

- Focus career and technical training opportunities on jobs the Michigan economy has available (e.g., health care, construction).
- Provide supportive services when clients face serious barriers to work, with the goal of reducing/removing those barriers so clients can participate in work or work preparation.
- Provide advocacy and support for those who are making application for Supplemental Security Income.
- Extend post-employment support from 90 days to 180 days to help clients retain jobs and prepare a plan for advancement.

“The DHS welfare reform plan will meet federal work participation requirements within the federal time frame, protect the safety net, and help people become permanently attached to the labor force so they can move their families out of poverty,” said Udow. “We want to get more people working permanently in Michigan – self-sufficiency is better for families, and what is better for families is better for children.”

For more information about the Department of Human Services, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

For more information about JET go to www.michigan.gov/jet

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